

PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING ON MARCH 8, 2016
TESTIMONY ON SB 357- AN ACT CONCERNING GAMING
CHIEF VELKY / SCHAGHTICOKE TRIBAL NATION

Chairman Larson, Chairman Dargan, and members of the Public Safety & Security Committee.

My name is Richard Velky and I am Chief of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation. I am here to testify on S.B. 357- An Act Concerning Gaming.

We appreciate your Committee addressing this issue, as Bingo operations have long been important economic development enterprises for tribes throughout our country.

The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation is a Connecticut recognized tribe - just like the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Mohegan Tribe. As many of you know, we have been pursuing an opportunity to create our own gaming entity. We therefore ask the Committee to amend S.B. 357 to give the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation—and all state-recognized Tribes—an opportunity to conduct tribal bingo operations.

I also urge the Committee to keep this bill focused on its stated purpose: amending and correcting the State's bingo laws. I have been told that some parties want to use S.B. 357 for other, unrelated purposes, such as an expansion into commercial casino gaming. It would be wise if the Committee did not go down that path until the impact of commercial gaming is thoroughly studied and documented.

If the Committee does however choose to consider issues that go beyond the scope of the State's bingo laws, we have two additional requests:

- Amend S.B. 357 to permit state-recognized tribes to participate in any expansion of commercial casino gaming, not just limiting any potential new commercial casino enterprise to the existing federally recognized tribes.
- Support the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation's efforts to become federally recognized.

The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation is one of the oldest state-recognized tribes in the United States.

The Colony of Connecticut formally recognized our reservation in 1736. We obtained federal recognition as a sovereign nation in 2004. A federal official later said that our application was "among the best and most thoroughly researched petitions ever reviewed" by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The State of Connecticut then vigorously fought our status as a federally-recognized sovereign tribe. This involved a political campaign in which many senior-ranking State public officials made public comments criticizing the Department of Interior's decision. Formal challenges were filed by the State against my Tribe's federal recognition.

Eventually the State's campaign was successful and the Department of Interior issued a Reconsidered Final Determination dated October 11, 2005.

The primary reason behind the State's opposition was fear of losing the Pequot Fund by preventing the development of a third casino. Last Session the Legislature began a process for a third casino. Indeed, recently we were unconstitutionally denied the right to start the process required to develop a commercial casino under Special Act 15-7. Understand, we are ready, willing and able to participate in that development process.

I respectfully urge this Committee and the State of Connecticut not to play politics with the jobs and lives of our people by consistently supporting only the interests of Connecticut's two privileged tribes. To us, tribal gaming is about creating an economic opportunity for an impoverished people – and if we were permitted to pursue gaming, we would use that opportunity to create jobs, not only for us, but for many thousands in the surrounding community.

Give us a chance to succeed by amending S.B. 357 to allow us to have class II bingo gaming and ensuring that we are given equal consideration for any future potential commercial casino in the State.

Thank You!